

CHAPTER 7 FRAMEWORK FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

“The neighborhood is a natural phenomenon. It is organic, growing naturally wherever people live close to one another... Neighborhoods can be cultivated and nourished, protected and allowed to blossom to full maturity. Or they can be stunted, made to struggle for existence.” (Hallman)

“Neighborhood planning, a tremendous potential ordinary folks have to take charge of their community.” (Jones)

The 2020 Comprehensive Plan contained a chapter titled “Planning for Roswell Neighborhoods.” That chapter was not a required element of the state’s minimum planning standards. At the time the chapter was written, however, there was a desire on the part of the planning staff to recognize existing neighborhood planning efforts and set a framework for neighborhood planning efforts in the future.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this chapter are to:

1. Articulate how Roswell would benefit from neighborhood planning;
2. Define neighborhoods by their development characteristics and boundaries;
3. Provide a framework for preparing neighborhood plans; and,
4. Suggest neighborhood self-help programs and neighborhood policies.

BENEFITS OF NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

Sense of Community

Neighborhood planning contributes to an increase in the sense of community that individuals experience. People who have a strong sense of community also believe that they have some control over what happens in their neighborhoods. They also believe that their needs can be met through the collective capabilities of their neighbors. People who know their neighbors share emotional connections and experience social bonding. In short, the more neighbors interact, the more likely they are to become close to each other. People with a stronger sense of community are more likely to vote, contact their public officials, and work on public problems affecting their locality and beyond.

Sense of Identity

Neighborhood planning helps create a sense of identity through initiatives such as development of a common symbol system within a neighborhood. Neighborhood strategies also encourage the identification of unique neighborhood qualities.

Sense of Control

Neighborhood planning and development provides the opportunity for citizens to assert greater control of their immediate environs through planning at the local level.

Sense of Security

Neighborhood planning increases not only the perception of safety but in fact can lead to enhanced security. If neighbors feel secure they often increase the quantity of contacts with their neighbors. For instance, neighborhood crime watch programs developed by residents, city officials, and police, often increase safety, interaction among residents, and instill a greater sense of community.

Enhanced Link to the Comprehensive Plan

Neighborhood planning enhances the extent to which the City's Comprehensive Plan addresses specific issues related to neighborhoods. Neighborhood planning processes provide for increased public participation, smaller-scale land use planning, neighborhood preservation and enhancement programs, and policies for neighborhood facilities and services.

Unique Physical Design

From a "pre-neighborhood" position, planning *for* the neighborhood through the physical design of the neighborhood is important. A neighborhood with a physical design that encourages "neighborliness" contributes to the sense of community that people experience. For instance, advocates of new urbanism – neo-traditional designs with walkable streets, front porches, greater pedestrian access, mixed densities, public gathering places and neighborhood commercial land uses – fosters a sense of community not provided in conventional suburban developments.

Additional Benefits

Neighborhood efforts tend to be "more responsive to local problems, increase commitment to the neighborhood, increase citizen participation, build leadership at the local level, improve physical conditions and public services, increase local interaction and sense of community, foster social integration, increase trust in local government, and bring about a more equitable distribution of public goods" (Rohe and Gates).

DEFINING NEIGHBORHOODS

Many different definitions have been offered to define neighborhoods. In older urban areas, neighborhoods are often defined by the sharing of various community facilities and institutions (corner store, church, school, etc.), or the existence of distinctive racial, ethnic or economic class.

These characteristics do not entirely fit Roswell's neighborhoods for two reasons. First, Roswell's zoning and land use patterns have largely separated the single-family residential areas from non-residential uses. Second, Roswell is relatively homogeneous and therefore does not have many sharp edges that contrast racial, ethnic or economic class. There are significant exceptions to these two generalizations about neighborhoods in the City of Roswell

(the City does have African-American and Hispanic, as well as lower income neighborhood areas), but for the most part they hold true.

Types of Roswell Neighborhoods

With the exception of its historic neighborhoods and few remaining rural areas, the Roswell we see today is predominantly a collection of subdivisions and planned communities. It is the classic post-World War II, single-family residential, suburban development that typifies most of northern Fulton County. Neighborhood development in Roswell can be generally categorized as:

- Pre-World War II development (500 units; 1.7percent)
 - Original historic Roswell settlement
 - Older, rural development
- Post-World War II suburban development, built prior to 1970 (2700 units; 9.1 percent)
- Development built after 1970 (26,500 units; 89.2 percent)
 - Independently developed subdivisions
 - Master Planned Communities such as Martin's Landing, Brookfield West, Willow Springs, Horseshoe Bend, and Saddle Creek. Definable boundaries.
- Rural development (part of above percent)

Roswell Neighborhood Characteristics

A field survey was conducted of residential developments within Roswell in 1999 to determine the variety of physical characteristics of neighborhoods within the City. Fortunately, unlike many older urban areas, the City had only a limited number of isolated neighborhood pockets that would be considered blighted or deteriorating. These areas were typically in the minority or elderly community where limited income made housing maintenance difficult.

Residential streets were usually found in good condition, although many of them were constructed nearly 30 years ago. Most streets had curbing but in only limited instances were sidewalks available. Street tree canopies were prevalent in the older neighborhoods but noticeably absent in newer developments. Neighborhood yards tended to be better maintained in developments built since 1970, perhaps an indication of older residents with less physical or fiscal ability to undertake yard work. Areas of the City with a large number of housing units built prior to 1970 also had higher percentages of rental properties.

Typically, only those neighborhoods developed as planned communities offered recreational opportunities that were integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood. Other developments were dependent upon City-sponsored recreation facilities that were not typically designed for walking to and from the neighborhoods. Other places for gathering, such as churches and schools, were only infrequently a part of the City's neighborhood context. A notable exception was within historic Roswell where churches and schools were a very large part of the

neighborhood. In fact, a significant amount of land within the historic neighborhood area was consumed by very expansive worship facilities or schools. The original plan of the City was built around them.

The major issues confronting neighborhoods within the City appear to be the following: increased number of rental properties within older residential neighborhoods; older residential areas encroached upon by non-residential uses; free-standing subdivisions that have no connectivity to adjacent development, neither by roadway or walkway; a lack of public gathering places where neighbors can meet neighbors; a lack of identity or distinctiveness; and isolation from neighborhood services that can be conveniently accessed by walking or biking.

Delineating Neighborhood Boundaries

One of the first things needed to define neighborhoods within Roswell is to actually delineate neighborhood boundaries. However, neighborhood boundaries may be delineated by using a variety of criteria. Sometimes, the boundaries are clearly demarcated and agreed upon, but most of the time the boundaries are less distinct and a matter of varied opinion. Table 7.1 illustrates how different people tend to delineate neighborhoods based on different criteria.

Table 7.1
Different Viewpoints for Delineating Neighborhoods

Viewpoint	Likely Basis For Delineating Neighborhoods
City planners	Census tract boundaries or land use patterns
Municipal administrators	Service areas
School officials	School attendance zones
Sociologists	Homogeneity of social classes; historical factors; self-identity
Realtors and mortgage lenders	Homes of similar type and value
Elected officials	Voting precincts
Occupants of single family detached dwellings	Civic association areas; areas where the market value of housing noticeably changes

Source: Based on Hallman 1984, pp. 56-57.

Delineating Roswell Neighborhoods

It is tempting to superimpose a geography of neighborhoods on Roswell that will serve as a framework for neighborhood planning. However, it should not be left to "outsiders" to make determinations about what constitutes a neighborhood and decide how to draw boundaries. It should be the residents of the various residential areas of the City that decide what constitutes the boundaries of their neighborhoods.

Geographical boundaries are best defined by neighborhoods themselves. Therefore, for purposes of this chapter, a "neighborhood" is defined broadly to be "any geographic area within Roswell that makes sense to its residents and can serve as an arena for improving the quality of life within the neighborhood." Any area that meets this basic definition can and should be defined and delineated as a Roswell neighborhood.

ELEMENTS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

A key objective of this chapter is to provide a framework for preparing neighborhood plans. Bernie Jones, in his book *Neighborhood Planning, A Guide for Citizens and Planners*, identified five "easy" steps for undertaking neighborhood planning:

- Collecting and analyzing the information;
- Setting goals;
- Identifying alternatives and putting the plan together;
- Determining how to implement the plan;
- Monitoring, evaluating and updating the plan.

To take these steps a bit further, we have summarized a document prepared by Gregory (1998). After reviewing 50 neighborhood plans, she categorized the elements that these plans had most in common under five broad headings:

- General Housekeeping - organizational items that make the plan readable and usable and encourage further participation;
- Planning Process Validation - elements that demonstrate the legitimacy of the research and consensus building process;
- Neighborhood Establishment - elements that serve to create an image of identity for the community;
- Functional Elements - elements that are the basic inventory and analysis of neighborhoods; and,
- Implementation Elements - goals, programs, actions, schedules, who is responsible, and financing options.

Providing opportunities for neighbors to draw lines on maps (where housing styles and lifestyles change) and answer a series of questions as to how they use the neighborhood are excellent approaches to facilitating neighborhood-defined neighborhoods (Jones).

These potential characteristics of neighborhood plans are described in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2
Possible Elements of Neighborhood Plans

Component	Comment or Suggestion
General Housekeeping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name of the Plan 	Be provocative in naming the neighborhood plan but always include the name of the neighborhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of Contents 	Serves as a navigational tool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Frame 	Initiation date, adoption date (front cover), horizon date (1 - 10 years) and milestones -- to indicate progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgments 	Give credit to staff and neighborhood volunteers and other contributors (at the beginning or end); include names, title and affiliation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glossary 	Defining planning terms and key words or local lingo (best placed in the appendix); very helpful for those "just getting started"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to the Plan Organization 	Include a few paragraphs at the front explaining how the plan is approached and organized; why items are included; how goals and policies relate to implementation; location of critical elements in the plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graphic Aids 	Keep the plan interesting; snap shots of citizens, logo, charts and matrices; text art; borders and boxes, bulleted items; illustrations of physical design recommendations; maps showing proposed land uses, zoning, circulation system, new sites for housing, community facilities, and urban design plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource Directory 	List of contacts; can be a supplemental booklet; need to keep it up to date
Neighborhood Establishment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boundary Delineation 	Very common for other service delivery providers to have different boundaries than the neighborhood has for itself; need to have consensus with City officials; can have citizens draw boundaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood History 	Sometimes after learning about neighborhood history, the neighborhood wants to recapture the past
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood Identity 	Marketing the neighborhood as a great place to live; initiation of annual cultural events; a strong sense of identity of neighborhood identity is evidence of a healthy planning ethic; create media packets
Planning Process Validation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood Organizational Structure 	How planning process is initiated and carried out is important to plan validation; how the plan was initiated, identification of certain events in the planning process; understanding of how the neighborhood organization was formed

Component	Comment or Suggestion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission/Purpose Statement 	Link the neighborhood planning process to the Comprehensive Plan and the stewardship of public health safety and general welfare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen Participation 	Attendance at committee meetings, appointments of citizens, reporting of outreach initiatives, surveys, citizen quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs Assessment 	Helps the neighborhood learn about itself and what the work load is; includes neighborhood inventories; helps gauge residents perceptions about the quality of life and whether their needs are being met
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship to Other Plans 	Shows that the neighborhood collaborators are thinking about the plan in terms of the larger community
Neighborhood Plan Elements	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential 	Issues related to promoting safety, aesthetic quality, accessibility and affordability; age and condition of housing stock; owner vs. renter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation, Circulation, Pedestrian Access 	Include trouble spots and policies to enhance circulation or reduce speeds, access to transit, bike and pedestrian routes, street conditions; should promote connectivity and walkability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Use/Zoning 	Concerns how the neighborhood would develop or redevelop under current zoning and densities; recommendations for zoning changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure/Utilities 	Sometimes this is more informative than responsive; very difficult to make an impact; need to get neighborhood plans in the City's Capital Improvements Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety and Crime Prevention 	Dangerous intersections, community policing, lighting, must look at facts versus perception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources 	Access, night programs, facilities, maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban Design, Architectural Control and Historic Preservation 	Texture, signage, setbacks, image and incentives for implementation; appropriate infill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development and Population 	Income, educational attainment, age of population, skill; plans for stabilizing a neighborhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial 	Access to neighborhood as well as encroachment issues; accessibility to commercial areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuisances and Developments of Local Impacts 	Eradication of nuisances or creating compatibility with major adjacent land uses (campuses, hospitals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industrial 	Typically not an issue with most neighborhoods but may appear in older areas of the City
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment 	Environmental assessment should be done to include hills, streams, drainage and wildlife corridors; serves to elevate awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-Level Human Services 	Improving social service delivery; day care for elderly and young; health assessment; mobility of residents

Component	Comment or Suggestion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational Needs Youth Services 	<p>Quality and location of schools, public and private</p> <p>Let the youths participate in visioning; local sport celebrities for inspirational talks; literacy, graduation levels</p>
Implementation Framework	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals, Objectives and Other Resolutions Implementation Program Funding Appendices 	<p>Sometimes called vision statements and policies; different terminology to describe their level of resolve to act on what has emerged from the planning process; sometimes plans are voluminous with inventory and short on this section</p> <p>May be a chart; timing, funding, funding horizon, responsible parties and implementation methodology; often time the greatest challenge</p> <p>Identification of resources to fund recommendations</p> <p>Ordinances, survey results, etc.</p>
Evaluation/Monitoring	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarking Annual Report 	<p>Typically this is the last thing communities want to think of after they finish the plan</p> <p>Neighborhood can publish annual reports on progress</p>

EXAMPLES OF NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING IN ROSWELL

In 1995, approximately 30 neighborhoods representing 640 homeowners surrounding the Vickery Creek area of Roswell organized to address issues affecting their neighborhood. The group was convened not to just target issues but to bring forth solutions and recommendations to address the needs of their community area. The group prepared a plan, called “River Parkways,” which provided an overview and recommendations related to environmental, housing and land distribution, transportation, recreation and parks issues followed by goals, objectives, and identification of what the City and residents should do to achieve the plan's goals. The River Parkways Plan can be seen in full in the City’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan on pages 326, and 333-346, mentioned here by reference.

A second example of neighborhood planning is Garrison Hill, a community in the southwest corner of Roswell along SR 120. The project focused primarily on providing design guidelines for the highway corridor. However, during the citizen participation process, a community boundary was developed. A neighborhood or community plan for the district does not yet exist. However, the community boundary established a geographic area that has prospects for becoming the subject of another neighborhood-based planning effort.

BEFORE STARTING A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Before beginning a neighborhood plan, there are some issues of which a neighborhood should be aware. The neighborhood is limited to the extent to which it can impact decisions affecting private property. The credentials of groups representing the neighborhood are very important. There is also limited ability of non-governmental groups to implement plans due to the extent to which non-governmental groups can be delegated traditional governmental functions (Salsich). Good plans keep in mind who the client is; who is going to use the information; make neighborhood concerns more visible; generate statistics that measure meaningful change; build capacity to systematically collect and disseminate indicators that inform and support local initiative taking; and evaluate the likely impact of existing and proposed policies on neighborhoods (Sawicki/Flynn). Good plans define clear roles and responsibilities for residents and neighborhood organizations; create specific opportunities for public participation; maintain a focus on local issues within the larger citywide context; and identify specific short and long-term implementation steps and activities (PAS 455).

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING POLICIES

Roswell neighborhoods could benefit greatly by taking the next step, nurturing planning at the neighborhood level. The following are some of the recommended steps that might be taken by the City to support neighborhood planning:

1. For interested neighborhoods, Roswell should encourage them to be proactive in organizing and developing their own neighborhood plans that supplement the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Roswell's Community Development Department should be utilized to provide limited technical assistance to neighborhood planning efforts in the form of maps, existing zoning and land use, as well as demographic and economic data.
3. If a sizable number of neighborhoods are interested in neighborhood planning, Roswell should investigate alternative measures the City might take to become more proactive in neighborhood planning for a more focused approach to what will work best in Roswell.
4. Neighborhood plans that follow an approved process, show continuous promise for implementation, and meet the City's framework for neighborhood planning, should be adopted by Roswell as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

NEIGHBORHOOD SELF- HELP ACTIVITIES

This chapter has described the benefits of and approach to neighborhood planning. However, there are some very proactive steps neighborhoods can take with or without a neighborhood plan. Table 7.3 provides a menu of self-help activities that are being or can be undertaken by neighborhoods. Many of these initiatives are already occurring within Roswell neighborhoods, either as formally organized activities or by individual initiative.

Table 7.3
A Menu of Neighborhood Self-Help Activities

Activity	Description
Safety and Security	
Block watches	People in the neighborhood keep an eye out for suspicious activities, and signs are installed with an intent to deter crime.
Neighborhood patrols	Unarmed pairs of residents walk or drive the neighborhood to provide a "neighborhood presence" and call police in the event of criminal activity.
Operation Identification	Residents use an electric pin to put identification numbers on personal property to assist in the return of stolen goods.
Housing	
Paint-up, fix-up	Property owners voluntarily agree to paint and make repairs to their homes and improve the exterior appearances of their neighborhoods. Residents pitch in and help one another, especially the elderly.
Tool lending	Neighbors share tools that they need only occasionally, such as power tools for carpentry, ladders, and landscaping equipment.
Skill exchange	Neighbors help one another with tasks they are good at.
Environment and Open Space	
Neighborhood cleanup	Residents select a date and work together to clean rubbish in backyards and vacant lots.
Open space	Neighbors develop, maintain, and utilize tot lots, gardens, and open spaces, and tree planting programs with permission of property owners.
Mutual Aid/Care	
Day care	Small in-home day care facilities are provided for children.
Baby-sitting cooperatives	A cooperative to share in baby-sitting responsibilities to free parents up for leisure time and shopping activities.
Homework help/tutors	Adults organize to help youths that are having difficulty in school.
Community Events	
Block parties	Organized blocks sponsor annual events, or groups of blocks get together for events, sometimes with permission to close streets.
Neighborhood fairs	A block party on a broader scale.
Written history	Residents research and write the history of their area and produce a book, report or exhibit regarding their neighborhood.

Source: Hallman 1984, pp.158-167.

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